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ABSTRACT

Project Survival was a special innovative project conducted by the Atlanta (Georgia) Public Schools in the summer of 1991. By combining instruction in basic skills, opportunities to learn and practice conflict resolution strategies, and work experience, Project Survival addressed some of the major problems associated with high dropout and unemployment rates among economically disadvantaged youth. Funded under the Job Training Partnership Act, Project Survival was intended to increase the employment potential of 50 overaged and at-risk elementary school and middle school students from grades 5 through 7. All but one of the students completed the program, and the attendance rate was exceptionally high. Because of ambiguities and student termination, one performance standard initially set could not be met and another could not be adequately assessed, but the full or in part. Students learned to practice conflict resolution techniques, improve reading and mathematics skills, and develop good working habits. The parental involvement component was not as successful as anticipated, due to poor parent attendance. Early recruitment is recommended as a remedy for this problem. Project Survival partially met its goals, with the participant component being more successful than the parent component. There is one chart of student responses. (SLD)

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EVALUATION OF PROJECT SURVIVAL, A SPECIAL INNOVATIVE PROJECT OF THE JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT 1991

Department of Research and Evaluation
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EVALUATION OF PROJECT SURVIVAL, A SPECIAL INNOVATIVE PROJECT OF THE JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT
1991

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EVALUATION OF PROJECT SURVIVAL, A SPECIAL INNOVATIVE PROJECT OF THE JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT 1991

Project Survival was a special innovative project conducted by the Atlanta Public Schools during the summer of 1991. By combining instruction in basic skills, opportunities to learn and practice conflict resolution strategies, and work experience, Project Survival addressed some of the major problems associated with high dropout and unemployment rates among economically disadvantaged youth.

PROJECT DESIGN

Project Description

This project was developed and initiated by Atlanta Public Schools in conjunction with the Atlanta Private Industry Council, Incorporated (PIC). Funded under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Project Survival was designed to increase the employability potential of 50 overaged and at-risk elementary and middle school students from grades 5-7. Participants were involved in Project Survival from June 12 through August 9, 1991.

The participants were economically disadvantaged students who had been identified as potential dropouts due to their inability to make adequate and successful progress through the educational system and their inability to display acceptable social behavior in the school setting. Each had been retained at the same grade level at least once in his or her school career and had obtained a basic composite score below the 40th percentile on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills at the end of the previous school year. All participants were selected and referred by the PIC Summer Intake staff, were residents of the City of Atlanta, and were enrolled in APS during the 1990-91 academic year. Prior to enrollment in Project Survival, each participant was required to indicate a willingness to participate.

Project Survival was based at the centrally located Kennedy Middle School for the academic portion of the program and at the Camp Creek Community Sports Camp Complex, an undeveloped outdoor setting, for the work experience.

Students enrolled in Project Survival attended three half-day (4-hour) orientation sessions, June 12-14. The first session was conducted by APS staff; the second, by PIC staff; and the third, by Project Survival staff. Participants were paid for their attendance during the twelve hours of orientation.

Following the orientation and assignment to homerooms, students began their regular class and work schedules. Beginning each school day at 8:45 A. M. students met in their homerooms for fifteen minutes, and then spent the remainder of the morning in classes and counseling sessions. One of the classes used the Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents by Deborah Prothrow-Stith. The curriculum was designed to help students understand anger and how to respond to it in healthy (constructive) rather than unhealthy (violent) ways. The other class period was spent in the computer laboratory working on improving basic skills in reading and mathematics. Occasionally, the routine was interrupted by a field trip, an assembly program, or an intramural basketball game.

Following a half-hour lunch and time to prepare for the work segment of the day, students were transported on a bus to the outdoor worksite. At the worksite, students were divided into small groups to perform such tasks as clearing areas for trails, preparing areas where concrete would be poured, or cleaning up debris from construction. Because almost all of the work was done outdoors in extreme heat, adequate rest periods were provided. At the end of the work segment of the day, students were transported back to Kennedy Middle School. They were paid $4.25 per hour for 4 hours of work each day (20 hours per week).

Program Objectives

The primary goals of Project Survival were to create academic and work settings which foster opportunities for students to refocus their attitudes toward the resolution of personal, social, and work conflict and to involve parents in their children's learning.

The specific objectives of the project were as follows:

Participants will:

(1) Increase their level of self-esteem, self-sufficiency and survival skills through participating in wilderness experiences.

(2) Demonstrate an increased ability to practice alternative resolutions to social disagreements and adverse situations.

(3) Increase their level of academic achievement as measured by the pre-test and post-test included in the Josten's Learning Lab.

Parents will:

(1) Participate in an orientation at the worksite,

(2) Participate in parenting seminar(s),

(3) Review their child's skill development and employability progress at a culmination activity to be held at the worksite,

(4) Learn alternative techniques to resolving their own social and familial conflicts.

Performance Standards

The following performance standards were established for Project Survival:

1. All funded slots will be filled by June 17, 1991.

2. Slot vacancies will be filled within three (3) working days of notification of termination, provided that PIC makes acceptable referrals.

3. Dropouts will not exceed 10 percent of total terminations.

4. A satisfactory attendance rate of 85 percent will be maintained by a minimum of 80 percent of the participants.

5. A minimum of 85 percent of the participants who enroll will complete the program objectives.

FINDINGS

Data Collection and Analysis

The coordinator of Project Survival provided enrollment and absentee data, as well as program information. Evaluation of performance on the five standards was based on analysis of the data, synthesis of the program information, and observation.

Objectives -- but not standards -- were set for the parent component of the program. Information regarding parental involvement was also provided by the project coordinator and is summarized in the results section.

Although not required by the contract, students' evaluations of the project were obtained. Students present on the last day of the project completed a questionnaire on which they indicated how much they liked or disliked ten different aspects of the program, their interest in participating in the program again, and suggestions for improving the project. The results of the students' evaluations are presented last.

Results

The five performance standards are listed below along with the results of the data analyses.

1. All funded slots will be filled by June 17, 1991.

   Fifty slots were funded for Project Survival, and all were filled by June 17, 1991. This performance standard was met.

2. Slot vacancies will be filled within three (3) working days of notification of termination, provided that PIC makes acceptable referrals.

   One student (2%) was terminated from the program on June 26, 1991, the last date on which new participants could enroll. Therefore, the slot vacancy could not be filled, and this performance standard could not be met.

3. Dropouts will not exceed 10 percent of total terminations.

   In the absence of a definition of dropout and the uncertainty of the intent of the standard (was the intent only one of every ten students in the project or only one of every ten students terminated?), performance on this standard could not be adequately assessed.

4. A satisfactory attendance rate of 85 percent will be maintained by a minimum of 80 percent of the participants.

An 85% attendance rate was equivalent to attendance on at least 34 of the 40 days of the project (excluding orientation). Of the 49 students completing the program, 47 (96%) attended at least 34 days, or 85% of the time. This performance standard was substantially exceeded.

It should also be noted that 18 students (37%) had perfect attendance.

5. A minimum of 85 percent of the participants who enroll will complete the program objectives.

Forty-nine (98%) of the students enrolled in Project Survival completed the program and were acknowledged and/or commended for their participation during the culmination activity. The specific program objectives for the participants are listed below with comments on progress made in meeting them:

(1) Increase their level of self-esteem, self-sufficiency and survival skills through participating in wilderness experiences.

Rather than participating in wilderness experiences, the students worked in a relatively undeveloped outdoor setting. The physically demanding nature of the work and the environment challenged the students to develop survival skills, and success likely led to increases in self-esteem. Cooperation was required much more than self-sufficiency to carry out the tasks. None of these desired outcomes, however, was measurable in such a short time period.

(2) Demonstrate an increased ability to practice alternative resolutions to social disagreements and adverse situations.

In discussions during the conflict resolution classes, students demonstrated some understanding of alternatives to violence in resolving disagreements. However, this also is a long-range program objective on which performance could not be adequately assessed in the project's short time period.

(3) Increase their level of academic achievement as measured by the pre-test and post-test included in the Josten's Learning Lab.

The site change to Kennedy Middle School resulted in a change of computer laboratory also, from a Josten's system to a Wasatch system. The laboratory manager could not identify an appropriate pretest in the Wasatch system, and cumulative records were not maintained. Therefore, the extent to which this objective was reached cannot be measured. However, students in the project regularly received computer-assisted instruction in reading and mathematics in the Wasatch laboratory and demonstrated some competence in basic skills on a test administered the week before the project ended.

Although performance on the long-term objectives of the program cannot yet be adequately assessed, the active participation of the students in the three major components of the program suggests that these standards were at least partially met.

One of the goals of the program was to involve parents in their children's learning. The objectives to reach this goal and the extent to which the objectives were met are as follows:

(1) Participate in an orientation at the worksite.

The orientation did not take place.

(2) Participate in parenting seminar(s).

Ten parents attended an evening seminar, which included discussion of topics such as ways to detect anger, how to work with adolescent children, and how to defuse situations in which the parents themselves are angry.

(3) Review their child's skill development and employability program at a culmination activity to be held at the worksite.

The culmination activity was held at Atlanta Area Tech rather than the worksite and appeared to be well attended by parents. (An effort to obtain a complete record of parents' attendance was not successful.) Participants in the project presented a program in which they demonstrated some of their achievements.

(4) Learn alternative techniques to resolving their own social and familial conflicts.

Although parents were introduced to conflict-resolution strategies at the parenting seminar, the program did not provide the depth of instruction needed for parents to meet this objective.

Therefore, the objectives related to parental involvement were only partially met, and this goal of Project Survival was not reached.

The results of the students' evaluations are provided in the following table. Forty-seven (96%) of the 49 participants who completed the program responded to the questionnaire. A majority, 70% or more of the respondents, indicated that they liked "a lot" or "a little" each of the ten aspects of the program included in the questionnaire. More than 90% of the students indicated that they liked "a lot" or "a little" the conflict resolution sessions, being with other students, the field trips, and the assembly programs. The least liked aspects of the program were the computer laboratory sessions for reading and mathematics.

When asked if they would like to participate in the program again, a measure of overall satisfaction with the program, 21 (45%) of the respondents answered "yes." Answering why they would like to participate again, eight students responded that the project was fun or simply that they liked it; five cited social reasons (being with others, meeting new people, making new friends); and four liked earning their own money. The remaining students gave various reasons, including "teaches me to be a man," interesting experience, and "something to do next summer."

Students who were not sure whether they would want to participate again generally gave work-related reasons, such as "too tired," "worked too hard," "don't like working in hot sun," "not enough money for type of work," "might try working

RESPONSES TO STUDENT EVALUATION (N=47)

PROJECT SURVIVAL, 1991

1. Please circle the letter that best describes your feelings about each of the following:

		Percent Responding					
		Liked a Lot	Liked a Little	Disliked a Little	Disliked a Lot	Not Sure	No Response
Orientation	1	49	30	9	--	11	2
Conflict resolution sessions	2	49	43	4	--	2	2
Computer lab (math)	3	38	32	21	6	--	2
Computer lab (reading)	4	47	28	15	11	--	--
Working	5	34	43	15	4	4	--
Being with the other students	6	62	32	2	2	2	--
Being with the adults	7	49	34	13	4	--	--
Field trip	8	75	19	6	--	--	--
Assembly programs	9	55	36	6	--	2	--
Early morning team building activities	10	49	30	15	2	4	--

2. Would you want to participate in this program again?

Yes 45% No 17% Maybe 36% No response 2%

Why? _____

3. What could be done to make Project Survival better?

_____

_____

_____

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elsewhere (like Kroger's)," and "might try working with another program." A few mentioned that they liked the program, disliked it, or "some days liked and some days didn't like."

Reasons for not wanting to participate again included "too early in the morning," "too much to do," "don't like it," and, "I don't want to get any blacker in the sun. And I get tired of lifting them heavy bricks."

About half of the respondents provided specific suggestions for making Project Survival better next year. Some of the suggestions related to work (different worksite; no landscaping chores; less hard work; or more work, which like another suggestion, may have been for more money or higher pay). Another group of suggestions was activity related -- more sports activities, more trips, more or different activities, and "no school." A very specific activity-related suggestion was to "work with smaller children to teach them about nonviolence too." The remainder of the suggestions for improvement were people-related and included "no fights," "teach kids to have more respect for themselves and others," "more counselors," "teachers need to help more," and "have someone who wants to work."

In addition to those who made specific suggestions for changes, seven students suggested continuing the program as it was because it was already "all right," "better," "excellent," or "great."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Project Survival provided rich opportunities for 50 students from grades 5-7 in Atlanta. All but one of these students completed the program, and the attendance rate was exceptionally high.

Five performance standards were established for the project. One could not be met because of the timing of the termination, and performance on another could not be adequately assessed because the standard was unclear. Of the remaining three standards, one was partially met, one was fully met, and one was exceeded.

Students daily had opportunities to learn and practice conflict resolution techniques, to improve skills in reading and mathematics, and to develop good work habits, including arriving on time, following directions, and working cooperatively to accomplish tasks. Participants evaluated the program positively.

The parental involvement component of the program was not as successful as planned. In particular, the parenting seminar was poorly attended, and opportunities for developing skills in conflict resolution were scarce. The assistant superintendent in charge of the project has recommended early recruitment of parents as well as students as one way of remedying this problem.

Based upon these results, Project Survival partially met its goals. The participant component was successful in providing rich opportunities for improving self-esteem as well as developing interpersonal, academic, and work skills. The parent component was less successful, and more concentration on fostering parental involvement will be important for future projects.

Because of the long-range objectives of the program for which performance could not be adequately assessed, following up on the participants during the school year will also be important.

In addition, several suggestions have been made by the project coordinator and the assistant superintendent for future consideration: including a female counselor in the staff; increasing opportunities for physical activity, especially for the female students; investigating alternate times and transportation arrangements for parents to attend meetings and seminars; and using work site(s) which provide exciting learning as well as working opportunities.

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